

TESTIMONY OF Michael Hernandez IN SUPPORT OF HB 5185, AN ACT CONCERNING SPECIAL IMMIGRANT JUVENILE STATUS.

This testimony is submitted on behalf of Michael Hernandez, an advocate of immigrant rights from Stamford, Connecticut.

Michael Hernandez supports HB 5185 which seeks to extend probate court jurisdiction to an unmarried person under the age of twenty-one who is dependent on a competent caregiver and consents to the appointment or continuation of a guardian after attaining the age of eighteen, solely in connection with a petition to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services for designation of the person as having special immigrant juvenile status under 8 USC 1101(a) (27) (J). This bill is necessary so that Connecticut can fully implement the intent of the federal law seeking to protect vulnerable young people. Inconsistencies between our state law and current federal law hinders abused and neglected youth from obtaining the state court findings that are necessary to apply for an existing immigration benefit.

I currently have special immigrant juvenile (SIJ) status. I met all the requirements, as I come from an abusive childhood and my father abandoned me at the time of my birth. I also came to the United States on my own at the age of ten (10). By the time I found out there was some immigration relief for children like myself, I was about to turn 18 years old. My mother hired an immigration attorney and for many months we worried the probate court would not hear our case before I turned 18. Fortunately, the I-360 application was filed before my eighteenth birthday and approved months after. I am currently waiting to file for permanent resident status, which is the second part of the process. The burden of fear of being deported or an uncertain future has been taken off my back. I can now focus on my post- secondary studies knowing they will not be vain since getting a green card will help me get a job after graduation.

Being able to have special immigrant juvenile (SIJ) status is one of the best opportunities our state and federal governments can give our young immigrants to prove they are valuable assets to our society. I urge the Connecticut General Assembly to pass legislation to extend this wonderful opportunity to persons between the ages of 18 and 21. These are young persons who have suffered traumatic experiences in their home country, who would suffer substantial psychological damage if they go back and who are already integrating into American society. It only appears fair and beneficial to allow them to apply for an immigration law that currently exists at the federal level. Why bar them from taking advantage of that opportunity at the state level?

I support HB 5185 and I hope you will too.

Thank you for your time,

Michael Hernandez.